

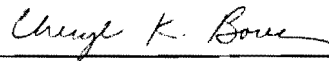
The Effect of Literature on Life

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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Abstract

The effects of literature throughout history have been innumerable, but they never seem more significant than when they resound in one's own life. Reading is a personal experience for every individual; its influence is impossible to measure, but it offers me an opportunity to form opinions and vicariously experience relationships in a way that will prepare me for future situations. My own life has been inspired in infinite ways by the relationships created within fiction. Although the plots and storylines guide characters through struggles and triumphs, the relationships between the characters teach the readers the most about life. By studying the interactions between characters, it is possible to understand and appreciate the roles that others can play in one's life. Through this study a deeper comprehension of people and human dynamics is possible. To support this idea, I have analyzed the three most influential writers in my life, Jane Austen, J.K. Rowling, and C.S. Lewis, examining the relationships formed by these authors' characters and investigating the impact these fictional relationships have had in my life.

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Introduction

Every book I have read in my life has impacted me in some way. Most of the influence has come in relationships. What I have learned from books has taught me to appreciate every friend, enemy, family member, teacher, and boyfriend. Every book and author has taught me something, whether in a new lesson or in a reinforcement of an old lesson. However, the most influential authors in my life have been Jane Austen, C.S. Lewis, and J.K. Rowling. All of these authors have valued friendships, romances, teaching relationships, and faith-based relationships. Each author has emphasized his or her most important associations and shared them with me so that I was able to learn and appreciate them.

This document will explore the power of the authors' teachings through relationships between characters. I will study the influence that these particular authors have had in my life by examining the relationships they have written. I have read these novels at different times in my life, but the influence of each book is still significant to me. Only by studying the original and current effects of these relationships can I analyze the force of the teachings. I plan on teaching myself to appreciate the power of words again. Since entering Ball State University, I have had little time to spend in reading books for the pleasure of the words. I have been taught by my professors to analyze every work I read for deeper implications than those initially found. This document will use that education to study the profound meaning of the relationships found in literature. It will also reinforce the authority of books and their authors.

I have chosen three authors who had a great impact on my life when I first read them. By studying these authors, I hope to further appreciate what I have learned from

them. I reread each of these books to remind myself about the most important and influential relationships in each one. In studying these books again, I discovered that I had not forgotten a single lesson in the years since I have read them. Instead, the sway of these books has only increased with time.

Jane Austen has been with me since the eighth grade, and I have continually learned from her writings. Austen has taught me that love only becomes valuable if it survives being pushed and stretched. Love must be able to overcome challenges. Love that is easy to give and take has no value. Austen appreciates the effort that is found in maintaining relationships. Her romantic relationships show that true love is unflinching and unbreakable and that it must stand the test of time.

J.K. Rowling has taught me to value the friendships that will last a lifetime. Every lesson I have learned from my friends will be with me for the rest of my days. These friends have taught me to prioritize my life; they have shown me what I should value. The friendships in Rowling's works and in my own life have shown me to appreciate permanent love. They have taught me to appreciate the sacrifices a friend must make. J.K. Rowling has taught me these lessons as an adult, but they are just as important for a child to learn. Children reading these books will be able to understand the preciousness of friendship. They can also learn that there will always be people who know more than they do. These books teach children how to admire and learn from others.

C.S. Lewis has had the shortest time to influence my life. I have only just begun to explore his work and appreciate his teachings. However, I look forward to the study of his works for many years. From this author, I take away a strong lesson in love and mercy. These books, more than any others, have taught me to become the person I wish

to be. I want to be a person is always loving and forgiving. I want to be seen as a merciful and just person. Mostly, I want to be faithful. Gaining the respect and love of those around me is important. Lewis has shown me how to earn those qualities.

Together these authors have had an immeasurable force on my life and person. I can no longer tolerate weakness and mediocrity in my interactions with other people. Instead, I expect to have fulfilling relationships that will enhance not only my own life, but other people's as well. Relationships are about education, struggle, faith, and most importantly, love. Every great friendship should include at least a small piece of each of these listed. These authors have proven to me the necessity of learning from those with whom I interact. We have lessons to teach one another; wisdom to pass around. No relationship should coast smoothly through time. We must be able to argue and fight, but we must also band together when times are difficult. Through difficulties and struggles, we form unbreakable bonds. Faith has many roles in relationships. Faith can be found in fulfilling religious needs, but it can also be found when we have faith in one another. The most important aspect of relationships must always be love. In love, we can forgive all sins and show the greatest mercy. We can be stronger through love of one another. Love is the entire purpose in forming relationships.

Every individual relationship is unique and special to me, but the influence of these relationships is the same. I have learned something from every interaction. Whether I have lived or read the relationship, I have been taught something. All great relationships have a lesson; they teach me something about life and understanding others' circumstances and points of view. Every relationship has also challenged me. I don't

think good relationships can be free from struggles. In fact, a relationship must be pushed and stretched to make it strong. Each author sees the value in these lessons.

This is the education that I will take as I leave Ball State University. Long after I have forgotten every chemical reaction I have memorized, calculus integration I have learned, or biological pathway I have studied, I will have the lessons of these relationships. These are the important lessons that I will have for the rest of my life. Ball State University has influenced my future a great deal. Not only I have been educated in science, but I have educated in people.

Growing into Elizabeth Bennet

My eighth-grade literature teacher assigned her Accelerated English class to read a classical work of literature. After reading this novel, we were supposed to then write a short story of our work set in modern day. This assignment terrified me. At the time, I didn't even know what a classic was. I thought classical literature was bland, dusty, and well, old. I scoured the library. It was a place I had spent countless hours looking for new and interesting books to read. I had never seen a classic in there before which I thought would be worth reading; I was convinced nothing would change my luck. When I stumbled onto *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, I warily showed it to my instructor, Mrs. Mac. She wholeheartedly approved of the work. I was jealous of my best friend who had a novel that actually sounded interesting; *Dracula* seemed much more exciting. However, I began to read my book with the same attitude as every other book I had read. Once I began, I was completely absorbed. The words became my life for days until I finally finished. When I was done, I read it again. I loved everything about this book; the characters were alive, the plot was timeless, and the comedy was brilliant. I was convinced that it was the most romantic story ever told.

Unfortunately, the harder part of the assignment still had to be completed. I still had to write my short story. I loved this novel so much; I didn't think I could bear to ruin it with my own attempts at copying. Nevertheless, I had an assignment to do. Somewhat grudgingly I wrote my story. To my own surprise, my teacher loved it. She encouraged me to continue my writing and reading. I have Mrs. Mac to thank for introducing me to Jane Austen. The next Christmas, my parents presented me with *The Library of Classic Women's Literature*, which included my very own copy of *Pride and Prejudice*. The next

year, I was given *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen Volume II*, which included *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. Later I checked out *Sense and Sensibility* from the library. I read Jane Austen ravenously. I was fascinated by her stories. For a woman who never married, she wrote about romantic love beautifully. Friendships and families seemed to hold only a little appeal to Austen. She created the most terrible scoundrels. She didn't highly regard children, but she wrote wonderful heroines. I identified with each of her main characters. Each one changed my life. I didn't finish reading Jane Austen's novels until I found a colloquium for Jane Austen offered in my senior year at college. We read all of her completed novels, but no one could replace Elizabeth Bennet as my favorite protagonist.

Elizabeth Bennet is a model heroine. I once took a quiz based on which Jane Austen character I was most like; I was delighted to discover it was Elizabeth Bennet. This quiz showed me how I shared some of Elizabeth's best qualities. I was thrilled when I learned I shared her sense of duty to family as well as her joy in life. Elizabeth can be quite serious, but she also dearly loves to laugh. She is a woman who isn't perfect, but she is ideal. She loves to walk and read. She jokes and teases. Her devotion to her difficult family proves her value and worth as a character. These traits were those I loved most about her, and it was charming to see they were the ones I shared with her. The quiz, although silly, provided me with evidence that I could truly live up to the standards of an ideal woman; I could share a similar personality to Elizabeth Bennet. Although I would never wish to lose myself to become just like a figment of Jane Austen's imagination, I can use Elizabeth Bennet as guide to proper behavior. She knows what every situation and relationship need without being improper.

Elizabeth has several major relationships in her life that she cherishes. The first is her close-knit relationship with her father. Mr. Bennet realizes that his Lizzy is very special and deserves likewise in her husband. Although he is not always the image of propriety, Mr. Bennet is very fond of his daughter. He confides in her and teases her. However, throughout the novel, Lizzy learns that her father is not always right. He mistakenly allows his youngest daughter to travel with the local regiment, which leads to her ruin. Lizzy warns him not to permit her sister to leave, but Mr. Bennet doesn't want to upset Lydia. As a child, I never saw my parents make mistakes and wrong decisions. However, as I have grown up, I have learned that my parents do, in fact, blunder. It is not until his daughter's ruin that Mr. Bennet realizes his mistakes as a parent. "No, Lizzy, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame" (Austen, PP 255). Mr. Bennet's ability to admit his own faults and accept his portion of blame has shown me how to maturely admit my faults. He can admit to his own daughter that he has made a mistake; she, in turn, maturely lightens the blame he has placed on himself. By trying to comfort him for his fault, Elizabeth shows a great deal of compassion. She could easily turn to her father with "I told you so." Instead Elizabeth reassures and consoles him. Her desire to soothe the pain in her family is kind. She shows me it's very easy to be right, but it's very difficult to be right with good grace.

What child is not at one point or another embarrassed by his or her parents?

Elizabeth is often acutely embarrassed by her family. Although she loves them, Lizzy is also very aware of their faults. Mr. Bennet is adored by his daughter, but even Elizabeth sees her father commit certain *faux pas*. However, Mrs. Bennet is a constant source of embarrassment to Lizzy. Her mother fawns over her daughters' suitors, making the

daughters and suitors uncomfortable. Although Mrs. Bennet is merely trying to marry off her daughters, she is usually making it more difficult. “In vain did Elizabeth endeavour to check the rapidity of her mother’s words, or persuade her to describe her felicity in a less audible whisper; for to her inexpressible vexation, she could perceive that the chief of it was overheard by Mr. Darcy, who sat opposite to them. Her mother only scolded her for being nonsensical” (Austen, PP 86). Although Mrs. Bennet is one of Austen’s most annoying characters, she has allowed me to see that affection and concern for her daughters is her only motive for throwing them at men. My own mother has never embarrassed me in the way that Mrs. Bennet could; however, I have felt the pressure to find a man for myself. Although it is often a joking matter in my house, my mother has only ever wanted her daughters to find men to make them as happy as she is with my father. This persistence in finding relationships for her daughters stems only from her absolute love and devotion for us. Mrs. Bennet has shown me that, although embarrassing at times, my mother’s interference is only caused by her affection.

The only family member who is never an embarrassment to Lizzy is her older sister Jane. The beautiful and sweet-tempered Jane is Elizabeth’s confidante and friend. They tell one another almost everything. However, not even a sister can be told everything in one’s life. For instance, Jane is not privy to Lizzy’s growing attachment to Mr. Darcy until their engagement to one another. Jane is so astonished that she doesn’t even believe Lizzy is truly engaged to Mr. Darcy. Although my own older sister is obviously affectionate, we have never developed the close friendship of Elizabeth and Jane. When I first read *Pride and Prejudice*, I was envious of the strength of their relationship. At the time, my sister was in high school and I was in middle school. As

younger sisters do, I idolized her. Everything she did or wore was cool. Most of my high school life was influenced by my older sister's life. Even now, we will both have bachelor's degrees in Chemistry. Perhaps it is her influence that has made our lives take parallel paths; perhaps we just have similar personalities. However, our roles are somewhat reversed from Lizzy and Jane. Although Jane is the older, Lizzy protects her big sister. In my own life, Sarah very much protects me. Whether it is by finding me a job or consoling a broken heart, she is my guardian and guide. Lizzy, as well as Sarah, would take on the world for her sister. As much as Sarah protects me, she also shares my secrets. When I worry about money or boys, my sister is the person I can turn to for the most understanding. She has lived through everything I am struggling to survive; she is wiser for the experience. She teaches me from her own education. Elizabeth also teaches her sisters. She cares for and guides her younger sisters by her benevolence and good manners. She acts appropriately even in the most awkward of situations, and she doesn't believe the world spins only for her. She is humble and modest, but she is also confident in herself. Her example as a sister is her strongest trait; however, she also tries to ease their pain. When her sisters are embarrassed and hurt, Lizzy will stand by them and defend them. Elizabeth shows me the type of older sister I want to be to my younger siblings.

A sister isn't Lizzy's only confidante. Charlotte Lucas is one of her best friends. They share secrets and stories. It is Charlotte who teaches Elizabeth why women can't always marry for love. Charlotte was considered a plain-looking spinster whose parents were not rich. She had no prospects for marriage until Mr. Collins visits her home. I have always known I would have the opportunity to marry for love. I am fortunate to be able to

financially support myself without the aid of marriage. When I marry, I can choose my husband for his worth as a man and not for the wealth in his bank accounts. However, Charlotte marries because she is an old maid and has no other opportunities to choose a husband. Although our society wouldn't push me to marry a man because of his wealth, I often feel the pressure to find a relationship because society says I must be in a relationship. Family reunions and social gatherings become painful when I am constantly asked who I am dating or why I am not dating anyone. Although Lizzy judges Charlotte because of her decision to marry Mr. Collins, I easily understand why Charlotte feels such pressure to marry anyone who would propose to her. In the time period the novel is set, the pressure and need of a woman to marry was far stronger than it is today; however, I comprehend Charlotte's desperation. "Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want" (Austen, PP 107). Charlotte is going into the marriage with a true understanding of her husband's qualities. She knows she is marrying a fool. "Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband" (Austen, PP 107). Charlotte is driven by her need for security and survival. As a married woman, Charlotte would also have respectability. She marries a decent and upright clergyman who serves an estimable woman. As an established married woman, Charlotte will have her own small sphere of influence. She is willing to sacrifice love for stability and propriety.

The most important and exciting relationship in *Pride and Prejudice* is of course Elizabeth's tumultuous relationship with Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth is convinced that Mr. Darcy is proud. His conceited and elitist attitude turns off most of Meryton society. However, his attempts at wooing Elizabeth begin rudely, but eventually even Darcy learns how to win love. When Darcy first proposes marriage he insults her family and low connections and is then shocked when he is refused. He then refutes the claims she lays at his feet, but he realizes then that his arrogance has gone too far. Darcy is proof that even the worst of men can turn their lives around and change for the better. Elizabeth would never have agreed to marry a man she couldn't love and respect. Eventually, Darcy aids Elizabeth's family by arranging the marriage of Lydia and Wickham after they have run away from his regiment and her guardian. He also blesses a marriage between Jane and the agreeable Mr. Bingley. Darcy learns that although respect is important in all relationships, love and affection are necessary.

Elizabeth also undergoes change as her tenderness for Darcy grows. She becomes less prejudiced against him. She sees his faults with new understanding. She becomes less likely to judge someone based on rumors and first impressions. Instead she observes how much Darcy's sister and servants respect and honor him. Darcy begins to value emotions, but Elizabeth begins to understand the significance of respect. I've never had a Mr. Darcy in my life, but I suppose I can keep hoping. It's Darcy who has taught me that I can't go into relationships and plan to change people; I can hope that some people with unfortunate temperaments will be improved by time and circumstance.

Although *Pride and Prejudice* is my favorite novel and its influence is indescribable, Austen looks at several other relationships in her other novels. The most

influential novel that Austen has written is *Mansfield Park*. This novel was much debated at its publication. Austen included hints at her view on slavery. Although she never publicly protests the slave trade, her censure is obvious. However, her quiet disapproval is not why this novel is significant to me. Instead, I watch the development of Fanny Price from a shy and timid child to a well-spoken and confident woman. Fanny is a heroine because of her ability to stand up for her beliefs. Although she is a push-over in the eyes of her Aunt Norris and cousins, she is a quiet statute of her values. She refuses to compromise herself to please others. Instead she faces the anger of her family members. She is even sent away from Mansfield Park, the home she has known most of her life, because of refusal to marry a man she does not trust. It's through her growth as a character that she is a role model. Because of the domineering attitudes of her family, Fanny could easily decide to always bend to the will of others. Instead, Fanny is defiant when told to abandon her beliefs. Fanny does not make these changes by herself. She is impacted greatly by others.

For example, Fanny is swayed by the love of her brother. William is one of the few people in Fanny's life that loves her unconditionally. It's this love that shows Fanny her true value. When she is underappreciated by her cousins, even Edmund, William is faithful to Fanny. Everyone, even a wallflower, must feel affection and love from others. William is Fanny's strength.

Aunt Norris is the antithesis of William. She is judgmental and harsh. She dotes on her rich nieces and nephews at Mansfield Park, but she abuses Fanny. She forces her to do heavy work when she knows Fanny is weak. When Fanny silently and without complaint lies down to rest, it is Aunt Norris who criticizes her for being lazy. Although

Aunt Norris is cruel and unfair, she teaches Fanny how far she can be pushed and what she will accept from others in their treatment of her. Even Fanny has limits to what she can accept in treatment from others. It is easy to describe Fanny as being spineless, but Fanny is actually quite strong. She knows she must exemplify good manners because of her precarious situation in life. She, more than anyone, is dependent upon the good graces of the family. Because of her dependency, she must accept undeserved blame and punishment without comment or reproach. This dependency only makes Fanny a stronger woman who is more able to stand her ground when necessary.

Sir Thomas is Fanny's uncle who has accepted her into his home. Although he is not unkind to Fanny, she is not one of his favorites. He will not treat her as an equal to his children. He eventually sees that Fanny is beautiful and grown up. Against her wishes, he holds a ball in her honor. Fanny hates to be singled out, but he insists on the party. Sir Thomas merely sees Fanny as a pretty face; he doesn't believe her to have a thoughtful mind. He cares nothing for her thoughts and her opinions because his society and upbringing cared nothing for women's opinions. When Fanny refuses to marry Mr. Crawford because she can't trust him, Sir Thomas is livid because he doubts her own perceptions. Throughout this trial, Fanny learns to lean on her own insight. A woman's intuition is said to be infallible; in Fanny's case, it is. She understands that a woman must know herself because no one else will. Sir Thomas can't understand Fanny's doubts; she is the only one who truly knows she can't marry Mr. Crawford. Even Edmund thinks it is a good match for Fanny.

Mr. Crawford is another forceful person in Fanny's life. Mr. Crawford is one of the first people to appreciate Fanny and see her value. His attempts at wooing her include

seeking a promotion for her brother, William. However, his own changeable nature causes him to lose Fanny forever. Mr. Crawford proposes to Fanny, but she refuses. It's this refusal that sends her home to her destitute family. Mr. Crawford teaches Fanny that she is desirable to men. Mr. Crawford is aware that Fanny is poor, yet he is infatuated enough to want her anyway. He is drawn to her beauty and goodness. He sees and values her integrity because he has so little of his own. He understands that Fanny is really a superior woman. He is originally attracted to her because she cares so little for him. Maria and Julia Bertram throw themselves at him and display all their charms. Fanny is in love with Edmund and doesn't even see Mr. Crawford. He is intrigued by her lack of interest and sets out to conquer her. In his pursuit, however, he discovers she is a fine woman. This breakthrough convinced him of his love for her, but Fanny is still uninterested.

It is Edmund who is the true force in Fanny's life. He is the first person at Mansfield Park to love and understand her. It takes over a decade for the rest of the family to respect her brilliant and exceptional mind. Edmund's power in Fanny's life is truly immense. He builds up her mind and creativity, yet he creates stronger beliefs in Fanny than he does in himself. It is Edmund, not Fanny, who finally assents to being in the scandalous play put on by Tom, Maria, and Julia. Edmund not only helps shape Fanny's mind, but he also falls in love with her. It is Edmund who finally wins Fanny's love. His long-standing influence and affection for Fanny have created in her a mutual affection.

Fanny could not be the woman she becomes without every good and bad influence in her life. In her acceptance of the harshness of realities, she is even more

commendable. Instead of whining and complaining as her cousins would, Fanny proves herself to be a tough moral character. *Mansfield Park*, more than any other Austen novel, is influential because of the strength of its heroine. Fanny overcomes obstacles and difficulties with a sweet temper and grace. Although many critics have found Fanny to be an annoying and whining character, I have found her to be a role model in how to act in the impossible situations I must face. Fanny is a solid and strong woman. She has taught me to never abandon my beliefs and values. I must always be faithful to myself. Fanny will not even give into the pressure of Edmund, the most influential person in her life. Instead, she stands on her own feet and never backs down.

Emma is a novel about a young woman finding herself and finding romance. When I first read *Emma*, I hated the title character. I felt as though I had nothing in common with her. After reading the novel a few more times, I finally managed to see my own life in the novel. Although I will never consider myself a bratty little rich girl, I can see that Emma and I share several similar relationships.

Emma is spoiled and somewhat selfish; however, she is also very generous to the less fortunate. She adopts the orphaned Harriet Smith for a friend. Emma's relationship with Harriet is more of a mentorship than a friendship. Emma wants to improve Harriet's standing in society. Emma basically teaches Harriet what to think, who to develop an affection for, and what to do. Harriet never develops her own sense of self; instead, she relies on Emma to give her a sense of self. I have seen this relationship in my own life as well. I'm happy to say that although I originally allowed others to influence what I wore and who I talked to, I soon realized I was happier as my own person. Kelly Frey was the coolest girl in the first grade. She was pretty, had cute clothes, and had countless friends.

However, when she began calling me at night and telling me what to wear to school the next day, I knew there was a problem. Emma had the same influence over Harriet, but Harriet wasn't clever or brave enough to stand on her own feet. She truly believed Emma knew what was best for her. Although Emma believes she is helping Harriet, no person should be dependent on others for her life choices.

However, Emma is the Harriet in her own relationship. Mr. Knightley is "one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them..." (Austen, *Emma* 8). Mr. Knightley spends most of his time with Emma trying to improve her. At times, he is more of a father figure than a friend and potential lover. In the end, Emma and Mr. Knightley decide to wed. Each has an improving and challenging influence on the other. Change cannot be forced unwillingly on a person. It is essential to know and be happy with ourselves, but we should also be susceptible to change that will make us better people. I do not agree with Mr. Knightley's belief that it is his job to teach Emma to be a good person. Change and growth should happen naturally and unintentionally. Most of Emma's growth occurred without the influence of Mr. Knightley. Her transformation occurs when she is without him.

However, I can't say that Emma's heart is not improved by knowing Mr. Knightley. Emma and Mr. Knightley are evidence that two distinct personalities can have a powerful influence on each other. Emma teaches Mr. Knightley how much a person can change. She teaches him that she can go from completely selfish with good intentions to selfless. Mr. Knightley teaches Emma to be a good person; she tries on her own. Ultimately, she fails on her own. It's Mr. Knightley who teaches her to treat everyone with compassion

and respect. Sometimes we have to lean on the understanding of others to truly discover ourselves.

Much of *Emma* focuses on the roles of gentlemen and gentlewomen. Mr. Knightley calls on the poor Mrs. and Miss Bates and kindly talks with them. He is never rude or impatient with them. The duties of a gentleman do not end here; he is also responsible for protecting women. Mr. Knightley fulfills this obligation in several ways; he is a knight in shining armor to Miss Bates and her niece. He realizes how destitute their situation is and gives them food from his own stores. He also provides rides for them so they do not have to walk long distances at night. A gentlewoman has a similar job to do. Emma is often doing her work as a lady. She pays visits to the local women, and she assists them in her own way. She provides food and supplies, but she performs these tasks in an obligatory manner. She doesn't do this work because she wants to help; she does it because she wants to appear to be a good person. Her role also includes acting as a gracious hostess and pleasant guest. When she is having guests over, she must make sure they are provided for and happy. When she is a guest, she must be charming. These duties are also educational. In Austen's time, it was the responsibility of the wealthy to look after the poor. Our current society often doesn't see the import of caring for one another; we only look after ourselves. Although there are some philanthropists and volunteers, it is more common to see neglect of the poor rather than attempts at aiding the underprivileged population.

In *Persuasion*, the characters take eight years to discover themselves. This time is used by each to overcome the past and unknowingly make themselves stronger. Anne Elliot is a character very like Fanny Price. She is unvalued by the ones who should love

her most, her family. It is only her dead mother's best friend who cherishes her. Anne is a great heroine because of her ability to still love after the rebuffs she constantly faces from her family. Although Anne has been criticized by readers for her spineless rejection of Captain Wentworth, Anne could not accept the marriage proposal until he had proven himself. Although Anne is unfairly influenced by her father and only friend, Lady Russell, she is not unreasonable to demand more from Captain Wentworth before marrying him. Anne initially rejects him because Lady Russell and her father manipulate her into believing that he isn't good enough for her. However, this time apart proves fortuitous for both lovers. Captain Wentworth needed to prove himself and earn enough money to support a lady. Anne needed to grow up and see the faults in her elders and herself. She needed to develop more backbone and willpower to be ready for marriage. She had to learn the pain that could be caused by a lack of self-confidence and faith in herself.

Lady Russell is a staunch and loyal friend to Anne. She sees that her family is unjust and unkind to her. Lady Russell is her advisor in almost all matters. Although Lady Russell's influence in the family is strong, she cannot convince the family of Anne's worth. Lady Russell has Anne's best interests at heart; however, everyone makes mistakes. Lady Russell doesn't see the potential in Captain Wentworth that Anne sees.

Anne's softer personality is overshadowed by the demands of her father and sisters, Mary and Elizabeth. Sir Walter Elliot is Anne's father. He is a snobby man and is only happy reading the family tree and boasting of his long lineage. However, it is under his guidance that the family loses its money and is forced to rent its home to strangers. Sir

Walter is demanding and harsh to Anne. He sees her sweet temper as a lack of pride in her family line and her desire to marry a penniless man as a disappointment to her station.

Elizabeth is Anne's elder sister and cares little for her. She is comparable to her father. Her concern is merely for running the household and maintaining her beauty. Her friend, Mrs. Clay, feeds her vanity and is therefore, her preferred companion over her sister. Elizabeth and Anne are equals; even if Elizabeth doesn't acknowledge her. Elizabeth needs someone who will act in a subservient manner; she likes Mrs. Clay's willingness to flatter. Anne would care for Elizabeth and help her, but she wouldn't fawn or grovel over her. In order to feel superior and more controlling, Elizabeth looks elsewhere for companionship. She finds the perfect friend in Mrs. Clay.

Mary is Anne's younger sister. She is married; therefore, she is too busy watching her children and overly concerned with her imagined ailments to care for Anne. Mary also sees Anne as a disappointment to the family name. She sees Anne as a weakling; no one in the Elliot family has time or respect for those they consider weak. Because she doesn't consider Anne an equal, she uses her for her own means. She uses Anne's sensitive nature to her own advantage by demanding her attentions for herself and children. Anne only wants to be useful to people. Mary allows her to display this quality by demanding Anne's presence to assist her in running her household.

The Musgroves, Mary's in-laws, are much appreciated by Anne. The parents and children prefer Anne's gentleness to Mary's snobbery. This appreciation has a great impact on Anne. She values how happy they are to have their children content. They do not demand "equal" matches for their children. Instead these parents show great wisdom and are satisfied by seeing their children happily situated in life.

Anne's relationship to Captain Wentworth is very difficult. Although she loves him and believes him to have great potential to develop further, she is persuaded to abandon him by her family. They spend eight years apart. Captain Wentworth uses this time to become a man; Anne uses it to become a woman. Wentworth is angry for a long time after the broken engagement; however, his anger softens. He decides to prove to himself, Anne, and Anne's family what a person he has the potential to be. He is promoted through the ranks of the navy while earning sufficient money to have a family. He never marries again because he is still in love with Anne. Meanwhile, Anne becomes even more forgiving and kind-hearted, but she also knows what she wants from her life. She realizes that her father and even Lady Russell have given her bad advice. Money and prestige will not bring her joy; she learns she will only find happiness with her lover. She also continues to love Wentworth. This story is romantic and undoubtedly hopeful. It makes me see second chances are rare but possible.

Anne is a unique character to me. Her individual growth as a woman is admirable. Eventually, she does gain her heart's desire and escapes her unkind family. Many people do not appreciate her kind nature; they see it as a sign of weakness that her family sees. However, I see Anne as exuding charm and elegance. She is not broken by her family's harsh behavior; instead, she overcomes their unkindness. Throughout every difficult situation in her life, Anne maintains her integrity. She doesn't lose her ability to love because of the lack of affection she receives. She inspires me to never give up on loving people, even when I don't feel the love returned.

Sense and Sensibility is also inspiring; in it, I see the same opportunity for second chances. However, what I find so amazing about this novel is the interaction between the

sisters Marianne and Elinor Dashwood. Elinor is the over-sensible sister. It is with her assistance that the household is balanced and life runs smoothly. Although she is very prudent, Elinor is still very sensitive. However, Elinor refuses to wear her heart on her sleeve. Her passions and emotions exist, but she hides them well.

Marianne is lovable because of her strong passions. Although at times, she is overdramatic, Marianne's emotions and passion for life make her a vibrant character. She shows all of her emotions for others to see; it is not until after her broken heart when she begins to realize the value of personal feeling. She teaches the reader to be a strong woman. No one can read Marianne and not see her inner strength. Her passions and emotions, although dramatic, make her vibrant. Marianne teaches the importance of love. She will not love anyone without giving him the entire contents of her heart. When Marianne loves, she loves completely and without reserve. To love without restraint or doubt is very rare. Marianne's family observes and cherishes her gift.

The relationship between Elinor and Marianne is a strong one. They are both devoted to one another. It is from their mutual affection that they learn the most about themselves. Elinor is faced with a broken heart of her own; however, she stays strong and never asks for comfort from anyone. She refuses to allow anyone to see how hurt she is. Her stony exterior will not allow her to receive comfort from anyone. From Marianne, she learns the value of that comfort. At one time or another, everyone needs a spare shoulder on which to cry. Marianne is also faced with a refusal from a lover, but she allows the world to see her emotions. She sends letters to her lover, Willoughby. It was unacceptable in the setting of the novel to send a letter to a man who was not one's betrothed. Marianne makes public scenes. Everyone in her social circle knows of her

devastation. She expects everyone to comfort her. She learns from Elinor's strength that not all emotions are meant for the public. It is Elinor who teaches Marianne to turn her life around after her illness; Marianne becomes more sensible. Sometimes we all need to keep our tears to ourselves in private.

Marianne and Elinor both gain wisdom from one another. This education is useful to me in several ways. From this experience I have learned to balance my own emotions. I cannot bottle my sentiments, but I also can't show them to everyone. Instead, I must discover how to control my feelings. The second part of my education has been about allowing me to learn from others. It is often easier to learn from my own personal mistakes. By viewing others and watching the outcomes of their actions and reactions, I can gain wisdom through observation rather than experience. There is little value in relationships when we are not learning from one other. The final lesson from the sisters has been about being able to count on family. When Marianne is very ill, it is Elinor who cares for her. Elinor helps her mother run the household. Marianne is defiant in Elinor's defense against Lucy Steele. Even when there is little that anyone can do, the Dashwoods prove that encouragement strengthens one another.

Although the women of the Dashwood family are unfailing in their affections for one another, Mr. John Dashwood is another case entirely. John is Mrs. Dashwood's stepson and the daughters' half-brother. He is not unkind to his family, but he is easily manipulated by his wife. She convinces him that instead of giving his sisters money for their dowries, they should consider themselves lucky with everything they have. In fact, he is convinced that they are better off than he is with his extensive property and inheritance. Because of his holdings, he is considered acceptable to his wife's family.

However, because of his family's lack of fortune, they are not considered worthy of joining the Ferrars family. John is not selfish on his own, but his wife easily convinces him to think only of himself. Thereby, he enhances her own wealth. She manipulates him into seeing his own situation as more desperate than that of his sisters and stepmother.

Fanny Dashwood is John's wife. She is inherently selfish and greedy. She thinks only of herself and her family. Her concern for others is nonexistent. Fanny, along with her mother, can't entertain the idea of Elinor marrying Edward, Fanny's brother. Edward is a shy and awkward man, but he is loyal to his promises. However, Fanny and Edward have another sibling, a brother named Robert. Robert is similar to Fanny in personality. The Ferrars family shows that although most of the family is wicked, Edward still became a strong and kind-hearted man. Edward teaches that every person must decide what type of person he or she wishes to be. We can be influenced by others, but ultimately, we must be the person we want to be. Eventually, Edward and Elinor are both rewarded for their goodness; they get their happy endings and are married.

Marianne is also married by the end of the novel to Colonel Brandon. The colonel is a middle-aged man who has already lost one love. Marianne begins their acquaintance by disliking the colonel for his mature age. Elinor befriends him and learns of his infatuation with Marianne. Eventually Marianne, herself, matures and discovers Colonel Brandon to be an ideal and good man. Marianne teaches that we do not always fall in love with the person to whom we are most attracted. Instead, love can grow in slow appreciation of the person.

Marianne, however, is originally in love with Mr. Willoughby, who is young and adventurous. He has the same energetic spirit as Marianne. Willoughby and Marianne

share a love of the same poetry, books, and music. However, Willoughby abandons Marianne to marry more advantageously to a woman with a large fortune. This devastation causes an internal change in Marianne's person. She swears to conduct herself more like Elinor. After her illness, Marianne is struck by her poor conduct with Willoughby. "I compare it with what it ought to have been; I compare it with yours" (Austen, SS 262). Remarkably, Marianne does learn and change.

Although I grudgingly began reading Austen for a school project in middle school, the power of her words and language has changed my life. The relationships and stories that Austen writes are just as powerful as they were two hundred years ago. I am just as inspired and humbled by these lessons as I was in the eighth grade. Austen has taught me to give love freely and cautiously, to observe and learn from the other people in my life, to have hope in second chances and reformed people, and to have passion and emotions but not flaunt them. Austen has influenced my life from the age of thirteen to twenty-two; I imagine she will continue to influence it to age ninety-nine. Although I do not live in the early 19th century, I am still influenced by the relationships and people in my life. It is not just the stories that make Austen so brilliant. Her sense of comedy is perfect as seen in her ridiculous characters. Her characters seem real and truly alive; they are not mere words in her books. Instead, the lives of her characters are played out in front of the reader. These characters are still representative of how we live today. The choices they face and the decisions they make are the same ones we cope with today. Whatever it is that makes her stories so amazing and characters so long-lasting, it is doubtful that its influence will ever wane in the future or in my own life.

Mourning with *Harry Potter*

I read the *Harry Potter* series the summer after my freshman year of college. I had spent two amazing weeks in summer school at the University of Hawaii, and then I was called by my parents and told that my grandpa was dying. I hurried home to say good-bye, but he died on his recliner about a day before I could get home. I found out all of this once home from Hawaii. The rest of the summer was a daze for me. I was lonely, bored, and mostly depressed. I slept all day, ate little, and barely spoke. A fight with my best friend before I left for Hawaii meant I had no one at home to whom I could turn. We were all mourning and upset, but I was overwhelmed by guilt at not seeing my grandpa before he died. Those months at home with no occupation and no companionship were the hardest of my life. My family was worried. My parents and siblings tried to cheer me up, but nothing seemed to comfort me. I felt completely alone.

My older sister attempted to cheer me up by giving me some of her books to read. As a last ditch effort to make me happy, she lent me *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. I read it in less than a day. So, I moved onto *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. I read that book the next day. I continued on until I ran out of the then-published works, finishing with *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. When I first read the series, I was just trying to understand the hype that surrounds J.K. Rowling's books. I didn't understand what about these books could create the mania I was hearing about. Even now, I'm not sure I understand why people stand in line all night to buy the first copies of the newest book or dress up to see the movies. I truly enjoyed reading the series, but I enjoyed all books. I was thoroughly confused.

After I read the *Harry Potter* series, I slowly started to cheer up. I became more like myself. I felt less self-pity and more need to socialize with others. I know these baby steps were all part of the grieving process. I would eventually feel better without the assistance of *Harry Potter*, but these books eased my feelings. I can't fully explain how these books comforted me, but I can explain the influence these books have since had on my life.

When I first started *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, I related strongly to Harry's sense of loneliness, but even he finds friends. I think Harry's initial state of abandonment reminded me of my current state. Although I wasn't alone or abandoned on a family member's doorstep, I definitely felt completely on my own. His arrival at Hogwarts only reinforced our similarities. I had just gone to Hawaii completely on my own. I was alone, and didn't know anyone for thousands of miles.

It is in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* that Harry begins most of the relationships he will have in his time at Hogwarts. Harry's first major relationship with anyone in the magical world is Hagrid. Hagrid is the Keeper of the Keys for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and he is sent by the headmaster, Professor Dumbledore, to find Harry. Hagrid has known Harry since his birth; he was friends with Harry's parents, Lily and James. It was Hagrid who delivered Harry to Professor Dumbledore after his parents were murdered. When Harry is to attend Hogwarts, Hagrid teaches him about the magical world and about his own life. It is Hagrid who explains the truth of Harry's life to him. He also takes him to buy his school supplies in Diagon Alley, a magical shopping area for witches and wizards. Hagrid befriends Harry without any questions; he loves him unconditionally. Not only was Harry the son of his friends, but

Hagrid also knew him because Harry had saved the wizarding world from destruction. Hagrid demonstrates unconditional love. He is loyal to Harry, and he is furious at his mistreatment. Hagrid's ability to love without question or doubt is stirring. He teaches what true loyalty and friendship are about. His only concern is for Harry's well-being. Hagrid has taught me what unquestioning devotion is. In my own life, I've had several people who have loved me just because they want to. They have no expectations for me, but they have strong expectations for themselves. My parents' best friends, Larry and Melinda, will do anything for me. They have no need to harbor strong feelings for me, but they do. Even when I haven't seen them in months, they still love me dearly and help me out whenever they can. Harry and Hagrid's relationship also reminds me of the relationship I have with my God. He loved me long before I knew Him, and He is unfailing in His faithfulness to me. He loves me without any conditions or expectations, and He loves because He wants to. Although Hagrid is Harry's first friend in the wizarding world, he will not be his last. Harry promptly discovers that he is an important person in this new world; his new role includes new and loyal friends.

Harry quickly meets friends on the train traveling to school. He meets Ron Weasley, who is also on his way to Hogwarts for the first time. Ron forms a bond with Harry before realizing that this is the Harry Potter who saved the world, but it is throughout the first year of school that Ron proves his constancy to Harry. He befriends Harry before anyone else. Ron has to prove himself at Hogwarts; he's the sixth child in his family to attend the school. He is desperate to be known for being himself. "Everyone expects me to do as well as the others, but if I do, it's no big deal, because they did it first. You never get anything new either" (Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone* 99-100). However,

his friendship with Harry doesn't help to give him his own identity. He becomes Harry Potter's friend, but his fierce loyalty and trustworthiness make him irreplaceable to Harry. Ron exemplifies what it means for a friend to be self-sacrificing. He has taught me what a true friend should always be. Ron teaches me what kind of friend and person I want to be to others. Sometimes I have to suffer and be no one but somebody's friend. I have times when my friends need me to be just their friend; I can't be anybody else. For a few moments I am needed to focus solely on a single friendship. In those moments, I don't have my own life or other friends; I belong singly to that one friend. The true test of friendship means occasionally having to give up one's own identity. I can relate to Ron's frustration with his large family. I'm the third of six kids, but sometimes I feel like just a number. Large families can be overwhelming; it's easy to get lost in the mix.

Hermione quickly follows Ron as a devoted friend to Harry. She is the smartest girl at Hogwarts; she comes from a Muggle, or non-magical, family. Although Harry and Ron are often annoyed by her bookish ways and over-achieving attitude, they need her to be complete. The three friends form a fierce triad that can take on anything. Together, they overcome great evil powers and still maintain a strong friendship. Hermione is also very loyal to Harry. She tends to be the perfect student and the "good" kid. She seldom leads the trio into trouble. Even when she isn't the one causing the trouble, she refuses to abandon her friends when they are in need. Hermione demonstrates a different kind of loyalty. Ron is the friend who will be with Harry when he gets into trouble, and Hermione is the friend who will pull her friends out of their sticky situations. Hermione is thoroughly determined to follow what she knows is right; she will not compromise her value system. When desperate times call for desperate measures, Hermione's intelligence

and her faithfulness to her friends lead her into trouble with the rest of them. However, Hermione will not be disrespectful to teachers, disobey authority, or give up her schoolwork, unless it is for a friend. Then, Hermione knows she can't fail her friends. Hermione has taught me to prioritize. It's easy to say that college is my life. My education is my current job and life's purpose; however, it's not as important as my family and friends. I will never look back on my time in college and regret skipping that day of class, but I will definitely regret not spending time with the people who will be with me long after I have left Ball State. Hermione would hate to miss a class, but she would do it for any friend. Although she inestimable value of her education, the people in her life come to first on her priority list. At the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Hermione and Ron pledge to stay with Harry as he begins his journey on defeating Lord Voldemort. She is giving up her prized schooling for her friend. Just like Hermione, I have learned that there is more to school than the education of books; the education of relationships and life is far superior to anything I can read in a Chemistry textbook.

Harry forms a different type of relationship with a member of the Hogwarts' staff. Professor Snape was a student at Hogwarts with Harry's dad. Unfortunately for Harry, Severus Snape and James Potter were sworn enemies instead of best friends. Professor Snape is one of the few people at Hogwarts who is not impressed by Harry, or at least his past. Instead, Snape sees Harry as the son his school-age enemy. Snape's dislike for James prejudiced him against Harry before he even entered the gates. However, Snape protects Harry throughout his years at Hogwarts. When Professor Quirrell tries to kill Harry, it is Snape who protects Harry. Although it is difficult to like Snape, he is not evil.

Professor Snape has taught me that just because I don't particularly like someone, I don't have to hate him or her. Although Harry strongly dislikes Snape, he doesn't have to hate him. Hate, like love, should be reserved for special relationships. Snape also strongly dislikes Harry, because he represents his father, but Snape does not hate Harry. He dislikes his father, but he will not allow Harry to be killed. Snape and Harry both reserve hatred for a deeper relationship.

Snape was also at school with Sirius Black and Remus Lupin, Harry's dad's best friends. Both characters are revealed to Harry in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. These are two of my favorite characters. They are as close to his parents, particularly his father, as Harry can get. Although they are the same age, Lupin and Sirius are very different. Lupin teaches Harry in Defense Against the Dark Arts. He sees Harry's talent and teaches him to fend off dementors by using advanced magic. Lupin sees Harry as James' son, but he doesn't expect him to be just like his father. Instead, Lupin loves Harry for his personality. Lupin acts much older than Sirius; part of his maturity stems from being a werewolf. He has had to face a harder and more painful life than most other people. He was lucky that Dumbledore would allow him to attend Hogwarts; however, he was even luckier to discover friends like James and Sirius. Lupin was very much like Hermione; he was a prefect. He was a hard worker and an overall good student. I like Lupin because of his relationship with Harry. Before he reveals his identity to Harry, Lupin watches out for and befriends Harry. In the beginning, Harry has few people who would love him, but as the books progress, so do Harry's relationships.

Sirius is a very special character to me. He is Harry's godfather and friend. Although Sirius has many faults, he has unfailing love for Harry. Oftentimes, Sirius sees

Harry as his father, but Sirius knows deep down that Harry is his own person. He looks out for Harry whenever he can. Sirius loves Harry as a son because he doesn't have any family of his own. Harry inherits Sirius' belongings when he is killed. Even when being seen could have endangered his life, Sirius still showed Harry his affection by looking out for him. Sirius has shown me how to overcome the impossibilities and injustices in life. He was wrongly imprisoned for the murder of James and Lily Potter. In Azkaban, the dementors destroy all hope and happiness. Sirius, although falsely accused, maintained his sanity and intelligence after thirteen years of imprisonment with no feelings of joy. Sirius is then forced to remain hidden away in his home to protect himself and the Order of the Phoenix. Although he is miserable and desperate for freedom, Sirius still keeps Harry as his focus. Sirius has shown me that I will be forced to deal with a life of things not being "fair." I have choice in how I choose to deal with this. I could choose to hate everyone I am surrounded by and be miserable, which Sirius sometimes does. Or I could still love and find a new purpose in life. Sirius decides too late that he wants a new purpose. It's by his loss that I have had to learn, instead of his actions. Sirius wastes a great deal of time being angry and petulant. His focus is misplaced. Instead of concentrating on his work for the Order of the Phoenix, Sirius draws on his inward resentment. He died before he could reform his outlook; therefore I must learn from his mistakes before I make them on my own.

Although Harry has a few father figures, he has feelings altogether for some of his fellow students at Hogwarts that have nothing to do with family. The first girl Harry really likes is Cho Chang. She originally dates Cedric Davies; however, when he dies at the hands of Lord Voldemort, she turns her attentions to Harry. Cho is the first girl Harry

kisses. Ginny really likes Harry when she first meets him, but eventually she grows out of her crush...for awhile. However, in the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Ginny and Harry finally start a relationship. Cho teaches Harry how girls act; Ginny teaches Harry about self-sacrifice. Harry breaks up with Ginny because he wants to protect her. Ginny, although not happy, respects his decision. She doesn't follow along for her own self-protection. Instead, she agrees to end her relationship with Harry because she knows she could endanger him. Instead of fighting to stay with Harry, she knows he will be safer if he is on his own. In the best relationships, we all have to sacrifice. Relinquishing what we love most in a relationship shows a willingness to bear the relationship. True love is not easy; many things must be given up. Ginny gives up a blissful relationship because she loves Harry and wants what is best for him.

Professor Dumbledore also wants to protect Harry. Dumbledore's method for caring for Harry is by teaching and preparing him for the struggles he has ahead of him. In the first book, Dumbledore teaches Harry how to use the Mirror of Erised. This knowledge helps him get the Sorcerer's stone before Professor Quirrell can find it. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore teaches Harry about Lord Voldemort's past and how to destroy the horocruxes. He knows that if anything happens to him, Harry must be able to carry on and defeat Voldemort. Dumbledore refuses to leave Harry unprepared. Dumbledore knows that knowledge is extremely important. The relationship between Harry and Dumbledore is very important. Harry sees Dumbledore as a mentor. Dumbledore expects Harry to complete his tasks; he doesn't coddle him. Instead, he has high expectations for Harry to fulfill. He knows that Harry has a destiny to overcome. However, Dumbledore is also a grandfatherly figure to Harry. He cares

about Harry as a person, more than as the vessel that must defeat Voldemort. This attachment is important for Harry because he has very few relationships in his life. Dumbledore's affection for Harry stems from his long protection. Dumbledore places protective spells and charms around Harry that allow him to survive longer.

Dumbledore also knows the power of his influence. He realizes that he has great influence in the wizarding community. He doesn't often waste this authority or his charisma. He also teaches Harry to use this power. For example, Dumbledore shows Harry how to use his reputation to convince Professor Slughorn to come back to Hogwarts and also to get him to give up an important memory. Dumbledore believes in using all of his powers, not just his magical ones. More than anything, Dumbledore is Harry's teacher. Great relationships can only be found when people are learning from one another. It's through sharing our own wisdom and experiences that we share pieces of ourselves. This mentorship is one of the advantages that Harry has over Lord Voldemort. Voldemort rightly fears Dumbledore and his knowledge.

To be a mentor is to guide another person. It is an incredibly powerful relationship. In my own life, I have had several mentorships. First, my gymnastics coach, Dana, acted as my guide. While she taught me gymnastics, she was also teaching me about life. I learned to develop a strong work ethic and time management from her. I also learned how to develop a friendship with an adult. She also taught me about the practical aspects of life. She taught me how bad smoking was, how to remain active throughout life, and how to be a teacher. It's through her that I have learned to be a gymnastics instructor. She has made me stronger, physically and mentally. Recognizing the mentor in Dumbledore has taught me to appreciate the skills she has given me. She taught me

many gymnastics skills, most of which I can no longer do, but most of what she taught me was about life.

Another mentorship I have developed is with my former eighth grade literature teacher. When I was barely a teenager with no self-confidence or no idea of self-worth, she taught me to discover and develop my gifts. Because of Mrs. Mac, I have continued with my writing. Her encouragement and confidence in me has been with me for almost ten years. Mrs. Mac has also taught me to control my emotions, but also how to vent them without being hurtful to others. She taught our class to do more than just appreciate a good book, but also to pick one out of an entire library containing thousands of books. Mrs. Mac, like Dumbledore, recognizes the strengths in people and then she develops and enhances them. Once again, Dumbledore has taught me to appreciate the influential role she has played in my life.

The most recent mentor in my life has been my boss. She has taught me what professionalism mixed with compassion can do for a person. She has taught how to treat situations like an adult does, but she has also taught me how to be an adult and interact with other adults. When I was growing up, my parents always taught me to respect my elders, even if I didn't like them. However, my boss has taught me how to socialize on the same level as an adult, rather than from the level of a teenager. Finally, she has taught me how to be appreciative of others. Without fail, when I leave work everyday, she thanks me for everything I did that day. When I finish an assignment, she praises me and expresses her gratitude. She also allows me to express my ideas to her. She is open and friendly, never aloof. She has taught me to be a gracious leader.

Dumbledore is another of my favorite characters. He knows he is brilliant, and he is not modest about it. He cares a great deal for his students and staff. He guards and cares for his friends carefully. When Hagrid was falsely accused of murder, Dumbledore firmly supported him. His loyalty to those he cares about is infinite. Although Dumbledore is very loyal to his friends, he also looks for the best traits in everyone. When he believes that an evil person has reformed, he refuses to allow anyone to dissuade him. His faith to the reformed villains can't be shaken. For example, Severus Snape formerly served Lord Voldemort, but Snape convinces Dumbledore that he has converted back to good. Although many question Dumbledore for his obvious trust in Snape, Dumbledore never allows anyone to sway his confidence in him. Instead, Dumbledore faithfully defends him. Dumbledore has taught me to have faith in people. Sometimes I will be disappointed by those I trust, but more often I will be pleased by these people. It's easy to have faith in the people who never let me down and never mess up, but confidence in these people has no rewards. When a character is reformed then trust is rewarded. Snape is difficult character to understand. He appears to loathe Harry from early in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*; however, he continually protects Harry. Dumbledore pleads with Snape moments before Snape kills him. I can't decide if Dumbledore is pleading for Snape to save him or kill him before Draco can. Dumbledore proves his faith in Snape. Until the last moment, he trusts Snape. I don't yet know if Snape was betraying or fulfilling Dumbledore's belief.

Another interesting character in Harry's life is Professor Dolores Umbridge. She appears first in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* as an assistant to the Minister of Magic. However, she becomes the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts.

She is not only a horrible teacher who refuses to teach practical skills, but she abuses the students through her punishments. Harry was repeatedly in detention with her. She assigned lines with a special quill that cuts the words into his hands. Umbridge comes to Hogwarts to take control of the school for the Ministry of Magic. She wants to make sure that Dumbledore isn't teaching the students about Voldemort. She and the Ministry of Magic refuse to believe that he has returned to wreak havoc on the world again. Her relationship with Harry is not a happy one. She refuses to believe that he saw Lord Voldemort; instead, she punishes him for lying. Eventually, she takes away Harry's Quidditch privileges and bans him from the sport for life. Her cruel punishments, interference at Hogwarts, and ban on Harry's ability to Quidditch make her hated by almost all of the students. Umbridge shows that malice will not win true friends, only enemies or those who fear her. She appears to be syrupy sweet and childlike, but quickly the students learn she is more than what she first appears. She maliciously fires Professor Trelawney in public. She also tries to take over Hogwarts when Professor Dumbledore leaves the school; however, the magic in the school will not allow her to become the real headmistress. Umbridge has taught me about the person I never want to be. She has advanced far into the Ministry of Magic. She has a highly respected job. At first glance, she seems like a decent person. However, her appearance of evil deepens as her character develops. She has a sugary-sweet personality that hides her true person. Seeing the dual personality in Umbridge shows me how much I want to be a good person and not just give the appearance of one. I would be happier working in a job where I earned no respect than to lower my personal standards. Umbridge shows that respect that is not earned is not worth having.

Draco Malfoy attempts to befriend Harry when they first arrive at Hogwarts, but Harry can see through Malfoy's exterior. He realizes that Malfoy wants to befriend him for the sole purpose of using his influence. However, Harry sees the value in Ron before Malfoy can deter him. The next six years at Hogwarts will be full of fights between Malfoy and Harry. Gryffindor and Slytherin houses are long-time rivals. The original founders of the houses were best friends until they started their school. From that time, the houses have battled one another. Malfoy is definitely jealous of Harry's fame and popularity in the wizarding world. Draco's father served Lord Voldemort until he was defeated by the young Harry Potter. Harry knows the Malfoys are evil; therefore, Draco knows that Harry could bring trouble for his family. The relationship between Harry and Draco has never been happy, but it continues to escalate as they attend school with one another. I have learned only a little from this relationship. Mostly, I have learned to be cautious of whom I befriend. The influence of a friend is very great. I have also learned that some people will never be friends. It's okay to realize that I may never be friends with someone, but I would like to at least be respectful of people I find distasteful, unlike Harry and Draco. Harry and Draco hex and jinx one another when the opportunity arises, but Harry would never want to kill or seriously injure Draco. In the beginning, Harry and Draco maintain a relationship that is reminiscent of James Potter and Severus Snape. As they grow older, however, their relationship could become more dangerous if they do not reign in their contempt.

Another unhappy relationship for Harry is with the family he must claim as his own. The Dursley family took Harry into its home because Petunia, Harry's aunt, agreed to keep him for his own protection. However, Harry would rather call anywhere but Privet

Drive his home. The Dursleys are very unkind to him. They don't feed him properly or give him any clothes except those they hand down from their son, Dudley. They keep Harry locked in his room under the stairs until they are forced to give him one of Dudley's spare rooms. The Dursleys hate having Harry in their home because he reminds them of the magical world. They lie to him about his past and his parents' deaths, hiding any information about magic. This family teaches me that although I have some people who are technically related to me, they are not necessarily my family. Harry knows that Privet Drive is not his home; his place is at Hogwarts. His family is not the Dursleys, but rather those who love him in the magical world. I may have no choice as to whose blood I share, but I do have the choice to decide who my real family is. Without the Dursleys' cruel mistreatments, Harry would probably not appreciate his friends at Hogwarts as much as he does. Although cruelty is not excusable, Harry had the capacity to use his oppression for his own gain.

Fortunately for Harry, Ron Weasley's family is all too happy to adopt him as one of their own. Harry is loved by the Weasleys not only because he saved several members of the family, but also because they see how much he needs to be loved. Mrs. Weasley is never convinced that Harry has had enough to eat. She sees how deprived he is by the Dursleys. She makes it her job to care for him like a son because she knows he has no parents of his own. Sirius and Lupin act like Harry's fathers or older brothers, but Mrs. Weasley is the person who mothers him. The Weasleys all treat Harry as they would another brother. He is eagerly accepted by all members of the family, with the exception of Percy. Percy works for the Minister of Magic and cares for nothing except his own career. The Weasleys are a truly happy family. They are definitely dysfunctional and they

have very little money; however, their lack of money proves how much they care for one another in that they depend on one another rather than money to satisfy themselves. Their love for Harry causes them to be put through many inconveniences and annoyances, but they do it all willingly for Harry. The Weasleys know that loving others is not easy, but eventually, we realize that love is worth it all the trouble and inconveniences. I too come from a large family. Being the third child of six is often unbearable, but the Weasleys remind me why I cherish my family so much. If I lived with the richest family in the world, I would not have the joy and satisfaction that I have when I am in the presence of my entire family. Money makes the road a little easier, but it will not give me the utter satisfaction that I find with my family.

Another example of love Harry has is from the members of the Order of the Phoenix. They all regard Harry as someone special. They see him as a little brother or son, and it's this affection that drives Harry in his ambition to defeat Voldemort. Most of the members knew Harry's parents and have known him since his birth. They realize his sense of loss and strive to fill the voids in his life. After Sirius' death in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the Order surrounds Harry with its support and comfort. They realize the magnitude of this loss to Harry. The closest person that Harry had to a parent, Sirius Black, died trying to protect him. Their support for Harry is inspiring to me. They all have important work and busy lives, but Harry becomes their focus when he is in trouble. Once again, this is an example of a true family. Although Harry is not related to any of the members by blood, they are closer to his family than anyone else. Devotion of this kind is comforting me; it makes me see the good people in this world, who think only of others. The members of the Order are also unique because of their self-less acts. They

are endangering their lives and families to protect the world. They are attempting to defeat Voldemort, not only for themselves, but for the sake of all others. They are giving up a great deal to do good for everyone. They realize that there are some things that make death a small sacrifice to pay. This group forces me to place perspective on my life. Some events are worth giving up everything else, including my own life. I value life, but there are many things I value more. I would give myself up for my family without thought; the members of the Order are doing the same thing. They risk themselves to protect their families.

The final and probably most vital relationship is between Harry and Lord Voldemort. It's impossible not to see the parallels of their lives. Harry and Lord Voldemort are both orphans who grow up with no friends. Both are not considered pure-bloods by the wizarding world. Lord Voldemort's father was a Muggle; Harry's maternal grandparents were Muggles. Both Harry and Voldemort speak in Parseltongue, which gives them the ability to talk to snakes. Harry and Voldemort both feel a strong attachment to Hogwarts and consider it their true homes. Both are ambitious to prove themselves. Harry was originally considered for Slytherin house, instead of Gryffindor. Slytherin was Voldemort's house when he was a student at Hogwarts. Gryffindor was founded by a man who valued true bravery and valor. He wanted to teach those students who exemplified courage. Slytherin was founded by a man who appreciated a healthy ambition and a pure-blood background. Slytherin wanted to teach only the students whose ancestry was pure wizardry. Slytherin also respected bravery but never at the expense of one's life. Harry shared qualities with both houses; he was very brave and also

very ambitious to prove his worth. Voldemort represented the Slytherin house well. He was incredibly ambitious, and he also treasured his pure-blood family.

Although there are several similarities between them, they also have many differences. These variations make Harry innately good and Voldemort evil. Voldemort focuses on the side of his family that is pure-blood. Harry loves Hogwarts because of the people who make it his home; Voldemort connects to Hogwarts, not for his friends, but for the deep magic enveloping the school. He considers the school important only for its magical characteristics and its use in finding people to serve him. Voldemort uses his ability to speak Parseltongue to have his snake attack innocent victims. Harry uses his skill to keep snakes from attacking others. Although the Sorting Hat put Harry into Gryffindor, he seriously considered placing him Slytherin. Harry heard the rumors of the darkness that surrounds the house and asked to be placed in another house; whereas, Voldemort embraces entering the house of his ancestor. Harry, after all of his misfortunes, still possesses the ability to love and be loved. However, Voldemort uses people instead of loving them. His servants obsess about him, but they do not love him.

This relationship is about good and evil. Each person represents how differently two people with similar upbringings can turn out. They show me that each person has the opportunity to choose what type of person he or she will be. We are influenced by how we are reared and by the surroundings in which we find ourselves, but we also have the ability to decide how we will work with what we have been given. This choice is very important. It proves to us that we have free will. Circumstances are not enough to make us who we are; we make the decisions that make us who we are. My mother always used to tell me that "The grass is always greener on the other side." In some ways, I'm sure

this is true. However, it is important to also realize that if my situation changes, my personality will not change as well. I must choose to be the person I want to be. I can decide every morning what kind of a day I want it to be. The ability to choose makes us human; it also causes us to make mistakes. These choices form human nature.

When I first started reading *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, I never thought I would do more than try to understand the hype surrounding J.K. Rowling. Along the way I have learned about life, but most importantly, I have been healed. I have seen how Harry has seen and dealt with death, abandonment, and cruelty. It has taught more about how I want to be able to take what comes in life. I thought I would read these books and pick apart the flaws. Instead I use characters in these books as examples of how to deal with every situation. I want to have a little of almost all of the characters within me. Harry's ability to love is essential, but Ron's sacrifice is also of great consequence. Hermione's loyalty to both her education and friends is significant. The relationships in the *Harry Potter* series make these books seem real. Each person brings a unique and defining characteristic to the story; every character is necessary. I may never understand the hype of these books, but I can understand the magnitude of the relationships. These relationships helped me to understand human nature and life. Relationships are critical in life. We will all have good and bad relationships. Although no one wants to be in an unhappy relationship, it's imperative to realize that even these relationships are necessary to growth. We can gain wisdom from those we dislike as easily as from those we love. The relationships are just as important as the situations we face. We must all face difficult times in life; without them, we can't value the great times.

I have begun to understand that the person I am in life is more dependent on my choices than on my circumstances.

Finding Jesus in the Lion

I first read C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in Mrs. Maltby's fourth grade Visions reading class. I wasn't impressed with the book or the Turkish Delight she brought in for us to taste. I thought the book was boring and had little to do with my life. I never connected to the characters or the story. It wasn't until my senior year in college that I picked up the book again. I read it in preparation to see the new movie. However, once I reread the first, I found myself continuing with reading the rest of the *Chronicles of Narnia*. My older sister always loved reading the series, but I always found something more interesting to read. My Arthurian legends and fantasies held much more appeal. These were stories that made me feel like I was involved. I was in the story and an active member. The few days I read those books, I was completely absorbed into that world. However, when reading the *Chronicles of Narnia* in college, I instantly related to the characters and plot. It reminded me of my relationship with Jesus. I realized that I wasn't prepared to read these books in the fourth grade. I needed to mature spiritually.

Throughout *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Aslan is a beautiful character. He is a natural leader, loyal and caring. His concern is always for his people. The children he brings and raises up in Narnia are particularly important to Aslan. He can see inside each one of them and find what makes them unique and special. He has the gift to draw out their talents and inspire the children to use them for his purpose. He knows what each character needs to perform his task.

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Aslan inspires Peter to take his role as the eldest child and as the high king in Narnia. It is his job to rule over the land, but first

he must lead the Narnians into battle against the evil White Witch. Aslan respects that Peter as the eldest must handle more responsibilities, but he also encourages Peter to be more compassionate and kind to his siblings, particularly Edmund. Aslan teaches both Peter and myself that being a great leader is more than ordering others around. It is important to love the people I lead, or I can't ask them to help me. He teaches that anyone can boss people around, but a great leader commands faith and inspires love in those he leads. Aslan also encourages Peter to be forgiving. He teaches that the best gift to give another is forgiveness. Aslan could have yelled and screamed at Edmund for his foolishness and selfishness, but he decides that instead he will show Edmund grace. This gift creates great wisdom in Edmund, which characterizes his reign in Narnia.

Aslan sees Susan and Lucy as the more compassionate of the children. These two are the ones who walk with Aslan to his meeting with the White Witch; they are the only ones who watch him being sacrificed. They are with him, crying for him, as he is resurrected. Susan, as the older sister, has expectations to go along with her age. While in Narnia, she is known for her sweet temper and great beauty. She is gifted by Santa Clause with a bow and arrow. Her weapon takes great skill, and Aslan knows her intelligence will help when she must fight. Aslan sees her intelligence and encourages her to be brave enough to use it.

Lucy holds a special place in Aslan's heart. He sees her strength and courage, but her faith is her most important characteristic. He also sees her good-natured spirit and desire to help others. For example, Santa Clause gives Lucy a special bottle of liquid that will heal anyone. Aslan knows that Lucy desires to help others, so he gives her the opportunity to do that. Lucy is also loved because of her immediate faith. She has faith in

Aslan immediately, and she always knows when he is near. Lucy teaches others the meaning of absolute faith.

Edmund is the third-oldest child and second son. Peter bosses him around and is generally impatient with him. Edmund runs away at the first opportunity of being an only child to a queen. However, once he is finally with the queen, he discovers she is evil. He eventually manages to escape the evil Witch and is brought to Aslan and his siblings. Aslan forgives him immediately, and he even sacrifices his own life to protect him. Aslan also encourages Edmund's brother and sisters to forgive Edmund. Peter teaches Edmund how to fight with a sword. Eventually, Edmund becomes known for his wise counsel. Edmund has an interesting relationship with Aslan. He has not known Aslan as long as the other Pevensie children have, but Aslan is still willing to sacrifice his life to save him from the clutches of the White Witch. Aslan teaches Edmund how to sacrifice everything for others. He knows the role that the Pevensie children must fill; they can't fulfill their destinies without Edmund. Aslan chooses to give up his own life to protect Edmund and save Narnia. His act of sacrifice teaches Edmund how foolish he was to run away. He learns that he can't run from his problems. Greed for attention and affection (and Turkish Delight) drove Edmund to abandon his family, but evil frightened him into returning to his family. From Edmund and Aslan's relationship, I have learned that someday I may be required to sacrifice my life for the greater good. Even now, I am faced with small sacrifices, but eventually, I will be called to lay down greater things.

All the Pevensie children are made kings and queens of Narnia after the defeat of the White Witch. Each one has an important role to play that emphasizes his or her individual strengths. Aslan knows all of this. Aslan's relationship with each of these

children is very unique. He knows that each child is special and different; therefore, he treats each one as an individual. Aslan shows how much each child means to him. He is ceaselessly patient and merciful. He teaches me to always forgive, even when I must sacrifice to prove it. Forgiveness is Aslan's greatest lesson. He teaches this lesson to everyone. He shows the White Witch this lesson by sacrificing himself for Edmund. He knows that when he gives himself up to the Witch, he will be humiliated and killed. However, he knows that he must take Edmund's punishment to save Edmund and Narnia. He encourages Peter to be more loving to Edmund and to forgive him for his past mistakes.

Another of Aslan's lessons to the children is about embracing their roles. Because each person is unique, Aslan encourages each child to focus on his or her talents. He knows that each child will be able to do his or her best when he is serving in a way that he excels. Aslan focuses on each of their gifts, and he uses his own talents to draw out the traits which will strengthen them. He has taught me to focus on the talents I have been given. Reading these books has revealed my abilities to me. For example, I can now see that I have the ability to understand and relate to children. These books have also taught me to embrace my academic talents. I have been shown my scientific aptitude, but I have also been shown my lack of communication skills. I should strive to work with my gifts and not undermine them. I will never become a great public speaker, but I could potentially be a compassionate pediatrician. I was made with these specific gifts for reasons unknown to me, but if I continue to use them I might eventually understand their purpose.

Aslan also exemplifies true sacrifice. He willingly gives his life when the Witch comes to claim Edmund as her own. She willingly accepts the sacrifice, but she doesn't know about the Deep Magic. Aslan knows that "when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards" (Lewis, *The Lion* 160). He gives himself to the witch. He is humiliated and tortured; and, eventually, he is killed. However, Aslan returns from his short death more glorious than before. He proves that he loves his children dearly, by giving himself up for them. This sacrifice reminds me to examine what it is I value. I should prioritize everything in my life and decide what merits sacrifice. Aslan is willing to give his life and pride for Narnia.

Aslan's presence to the children is fleeting. He helps them win the war and take control of Narnia. But once the coronation has been completed, the children are on their own. Aslan knows they must assume their own rule without his assistance. It's time for their testing to begin. They become the temporary kings and queens of Narnia while Aslan is the permanent ruler. They rule Narnia strongly and are well-known for their hard work and accomplishments, each playing to his or her strengths. Each of the children has learned the lesson that Aslan has insisted he or she learn. Peter became known as King Peter the Magnificent because he was a leader in both war and peace. Susan became known as Queen Susan the Gentle because she was kind-hearted and beautiful. Edmund grew wise and serious, and he became known as King Edmund the Just. Finally, little Lucy grew into her bravery but maintained her joy; she became known as Queen Lucy the Valiant.

The last major relationship of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in Narnia is the bond between Tumnus the Faun and Lucy. Tumnus is the first creature Lucy meets when she stumbles mistakenly into Narnia. They quickly become friends. This friendship causes Tumnus to be captured and punished by the White Witch because he didn't turn Lucy over to her. She turns him into a statue, and he remains in that state until Aslan frees him. His loyalty to Lucy gives him a great friendship with her even when she is a queen of Narnia. He is honored with gifts when the children are coronated. Tumnus values friendship more than life, and he teaches me that even the strongest friendships can be forged quickly and last forever. A true friend is one who will be with me in all the worst times as Tumnus was with Lucy and Lucy with him. When Lucy discovered Tumnus had been captured by the White Witch, she was determined to set him free. She is also willing to put herself into danger for her friend. A great friend is worth being placed in great danger. The value of a friend can be seen in the magnitude of the sacrifice one is willing to perform for another. This friendship also reminds me that friendships can occur between all types of creatures. Tumnus is a Faun, and Lucy is a human. Tumnus lives by himself, and Lucy lives with her family. They live in very different worlds, but once together, they place great value in one another.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe has mostly taught me about sacrifice for the greater good. It has also taught me about learning my role in life. If I focus on my gifts and talents, I will be able to serve others in a greater way. More than any other book in the series, this book is about love. Aslan sacrifices himself for love; he brings the children to Narnia out of love. His plans and actions are deeply rooted in love. This book has shown me how I can use my specific skills to show others love. I plan on becoming a

doctor who works with in the mission field. I want use my scientific gifts and flair for children to perform acts of love. This book has shown me the power of selfless love.

On the Pevensie children's second trip to Narnia in *Prince Caspian*, they befriend Caspian. He is the nephew of the King and the heir apparent. However, he has heard stories about the Old Narnia, the Narnia in which the Pevensies ruled the land and the Talking Beasts lived. The Pevensies are brought to Narnia to help restore the Old Narnia to the land and place Prince Caspian on the throne. The Pevensies form a friendship with the young prince. They teach him how to be a great leader and to rule Narnia. They restore the faith of the Old Narnians to Aslan. Caspian is to become King of Narnia, but he feels that he is unprepared for his new job. Aslan respects his humility and is convinced of his ability to perform his work.

Several lessons must be taught in *Prince Caspian*; the first one is for Lucy. She is the most faithful of all the children to Aslan. However, she often is not strong enough to make the others follow her. When she first spots Aslan again in *Prince Caspian*, her siblings refuse to believe her. They also refuse to travel her route because they do not believe Aslan really has told her where to go. Lucy holds onto her belief that she has seen and been directed by Aslan no matter how much her siblings tease her. Her great faith reminds me how strong my own faith should be. No matter how many taunts and laughs I receive for my faith, I must maintain my strength and courage. Lucy's failure to convince her siblings is also a lesson. In my life, I will have to leave the ones I love for the unknown. I will have nothing but faith to carry me through the mysteries. Although I will have friends and family to walk with me, I can't depend on them to always stay with me

in the darkness. If I cannot convince my companions to follow me, I must have the courage and strength of faith to continue on my own.

Susan also has a lesson she must learn in *Prince Caspian*. She believed Lucy had really seen Aslan and had directions for them to follow, but Susan wanted to leave the forest they were traveling through. Because of her fear, she refused to go along with Lucy. When Susan finally faces Aslan again, she is worried about his anger. However, Aslan doesn't yell and shout at her. Instead, Aslan gently rebukes Susan for allowing fear to rule her decisions. Aslan forgives her and renews her courage by breathing on her.

Edmund is not pleased to follow Lucy when he cannot see Aslan. However, he believes that Lucy is being honest. He is rewarded for his faith in his sister. Although he causes the most trouble in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Aslan is very pleased with his support of Lucy.

The Old Narnians are a very courageous group. They fight to renew the world as they remember it. They are fighting to bring Caspian to the throne. Their faith allows them to call on the Pevensie children. Of all the Old Narnians, Reepicheep the mouse is the most brave; however, he has a very great ego. He refuses to be considered a joke by others, and he challenges anyone who laughs at him. Peter sees this sensitivity, and he always protects Reepicheep's feelings when necessary. From this courageous little mouse, I have learned to laugh at myself. I have always thought laughter was vital to a happy life, but I have also learned that I can't take myself too seriously. If I can't laugh at myself or allow others to laugh at me, I'll live half of my life in embarrassment. Laughing at myself can ease the awkwardness of situations and make me enjoy my own life more. I can't bear to live with embarrassment; I'd rather laugh and enjoy myself.

However, Reepicheep has many great qualities as well. For example, his bravery is very commendable. He is willing to sacrifice his life to be a valiant warrior and to face the unknown. For the first time in my life, I don't know where I will be in a year. I could be in medical school, college, a real job, or even doing missions work. However, right now I don't know. Although there is a certain amount of concern and worry about the future, I also sense some excitement in finding new adventures. Reepicheep reminds me to look forward to the unknown. Without mystery and excitement, life would be much duller.

Reepicheep's followers are also great mice. When their High Mouse Reepicheep lost his tail, they prepared to cut off their own tails. They would not carry their honour if their leader could not have his. They were willing to forfeit their dignity for their leader. Their willingness to give up their tails convinced Aslan to restore Reepicheep's tail, which represented his valor and distinction. They are a group that is sacrificing a great deal because they can't have honour while their leader is without it. This group of mice has taught me humility. They know how great their leader is and how much they love him. They have taught me not to think too highly of myself. Instead, I should be thinking of how I can sacrifice and give to those who lead me. It has also shown me what I want to inspire in the groups I lead. I want to be a leader who is beloved and respected. I want my followers to care for me like Reepicheep's followers cared for him.

Aslan also showed me how to show grace even to those I do not like. The Telmarines are a tyrannical and cruel race of people. The race has cruelly ruled Narnia for a long time, but Aslan does not punish them. Instead, he offers them the opportunity to go to the world of the Pevensies. They can make new lives for themselves without being mistreated. Aslan demonstrates the importance of mercy to these people. No matter

how much I want to retaliate against those who are mean to me or the ones I love, I should always show grace and mercy. It will make me and those on whom I grant mercy better people. Mercy also makes a person a great leader. Justice and mercy must be tempered with one another.

This trip to Narnia is the last for Peter and Susan. Aslan tells them that they will be leaving Narnia for the last time, but they accept their loss. Aslan comforts them and prepares them for it.

Prince Caspian taught me about self-sacrifice for the greater good. Like Reepicheep's followers, I want to be selfless enough to give up my greatest treasure to someone else. This book taught me to be merciful. Aslan gives the Telmarines a chance at a new life. He doesn't punish them for their roles in terrorizing Narnia. Instead, he offers them a chance at a new world, the world of Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy. This book was also about being an inspiring leader. Caspian learns to be a leader from Aslan, Peter, and Reepicheep. It will be his guide as he reigns in Narnia.

Although Peter and Susan do not return to Narnia, Edmund and Lucy return to Narnia with their cousin, Eustace, in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader."* This novel follows Caspian's voyage to the edge of the world. He has sworn to find his father's friends. Reepicheep also joins in the voyage to fulfill his own destiny, going to Aslan's land. Although many of the Old Narnians are on the voyage, Eustace, the Pevensies' cousin is new to Narnia. He joins Caspian, Lucy, and Edmund on the voyage to the edge of Narnia. Eustace is a very difficult child, and he is not happy to be on the "Dawn Treader." Yet Aslan still loves him and sees his potential. He, like the Pevensies, has a lesson that he must learn. He is turned into a dragon because of his greed. In the first part

of the adventure, Eustace is very unkind and acts like a spoiled child. No one on the ship can bear being his friend. So Eustace wanders off by himself on an island one day. He hides himself in a dragon's cave and discovers the treasures there. He greedily begins to take them all, but he is himself turned into a dragon. During his time as a dragon, he learns the value of others and friendship. Aslan eventually meets him and removes his dragon skin and makes him a boy again. Eustace taught me to appreciate the value of friendship. To be without friends is to be completely lost. Without my friends, I would not be able to find myself. Already, I'm terrified about the loss of my friends when I leave Ball State University. Eustace helps me to value these people even more than before.

The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader" taught me about the dangers of greed. Eustace learns this lesson when he is transformed into a dragon. More importantly, this book taught me about the consequence of having a friend. A friend is of inestimable value. Eustace learns how lonely the world is without true friends.

The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader" is the last trip to Narnia for Edmund and Lucy, but Eustace will return. He returns in *The Silver Chair* with his friend from school, Jill. Eustace and Jill have an unlikely friendship because they are bound by fear. They become friends because they have no one else. They band together in hopes that Aslan will take them to Narnia to escape their troubled lives. Aslan answers them and calls them to his aid. He uses them to find Prince Caspian's son, who was kidnapped by the Emerald Witch. Their friendship is formed by mutual need for affection. They are tortured at school by the other students because they are good children, and each of them is in need of someone to care for him or her. In Narnia, they find a friendship with one

another, but also with Puddleglum, a pessimistic Marsh-wiggle. Puddleglum is their guide and protector throughout the trip in Narnia. The formation of this triad gives all of them people to care about them. Even Puddleglum needs someone to care about him. These three remind me that everyone needs to feel affection from others. No matter how brave, smart, popular, or beautiful people are, they are miserable and lonely without friends. Therefore, even the people I dislike most need to feel fondness from another. Without the friendship of others, life is dull and unhappy.

In *The Silver Chair*, the significance of friendship is reinforced. Puddleglum, Eustace, and Jill would be lost without one another in this book. They face many dangers and trials to realize the strength of their friendship. At one point in the novel, the three visit the home of giants. When they discover the giants plan to eat them, they each work to free the others. Each is willing to sacrifice him or herself for the other two. This friendship binds them irrevocably to one another.

In the fifth novel, *The Horse and His Boy*, more unlikely friendships are formed. First, Shasta, an unloved and abused boy adopted by a poor fisherman, meets Bree, a talking horse of Narnia. Together, they decide to run away to the north; Bree wants to return to Narnia, and Shasta longs to see his homeland. Bree is often tough with Shasta, but he trains him to ride a horse and directs him home. They travel a great distance and through many dangers to reach Narnia. They form a symbiotic relationship. Shasta is given a faster journey by riding Bree; Bree needs a rider to avoid capture by people seeing a presumably free horse. They are able to make it to Narnia because of each other. On the way to Narnia, however, they meet with Aravis and Hwin. Aravis is running away to avoid an unhappy marriage, and Hwin, like Bree, wants to return to her Narnian

homeland. They realize that they are all headed in the same direction for similar reasons, and they decide it is safest to travel together. This group works together to accomplish their goals. These humans and horses show how group dynamics should be. No one should be abandoned or left behind. Instead, all the members should be thought of and considered when making plans. Each person's opinion matters in a group, even if not everyone's wishes can be followed.

Aravis and Shasta have had two very different upbringings. Aravis was the daughter of a rich and powerful man. Shasta was reared as the son of a poor fisherman who abused and neglected him. They argue often, partly because they appear to dislike each other. Aravis doesn't like Shasta because he is a poor boy. However, throughout the story, Aravis learns that Shasta is a kind and good boy. Shasta, meanwhile, learns that Aravis is also a good person. She grows into a great woman, one who mothers great kings. Shasta and Aravis eventually marry, long after they learn Shasta is really a prince and future king of Archenland. These two teach that first impressions are very difficult to overcome, but they are often very misleading. Neither wants to befriend the other because both are mistrustful after their initial meeting. However, when Shasta endangers himself to save Aravis, she sees what a brave person he really is. Shasta slowly begins to respect Aravis for giving up her sheltered and pampered life for freedom. In my life, I have learned not to judge others by how I first see them. Every person has lovable and good qualities; I can remember those qualities and think about loving those people rather than disliking them. If the only thing keeping me from loving someone is discovering these qualities, I can withhold judgment until I learn more about them.

Aslan plays a different role than he normally does in this book. He frightens the horses and humans into meeting by chasing them down. The fear of the lion drives Bree and Shasta to Hwin and Aravis. However, he also wants to learn a few lessons before he sends them along their paths. First, Aravis is caught by Aslan's claws, and her back is severely scratched. Aslan tells Aravis, "The scratches on your back, tear for tear, throb for throb, blood for blood, were equal to the stripes laid on the back of your stepmother's slave because of the drugged sleep you cast upon her. You needed to know what it felt like" (Lewis, *The Horse* 194). Aslan wants Aravis to understand what her selfishness has done. Aravis learns that her actions will have repercussions on others, and she must remember to act more kindly to all people whether she loves or hates them. She must learn to be more selfless. Aravis cares little for the servant who was punished because of her escape. She thinks only of her own need to flee. When forming her plan, Aravis should have thought of the consequences her actions would have on the servant.

Although Aravis had the most painful lesson to learn, Bree had to learn how to control his pride. Bree has had to cut his tail short to travel unnoticed through a city, but the loss of his beautiful tail is very upsetting to him. He is a very vain horse and is easily embarrassed. He delays returning to Narnia until his tail is grown back until Aslan arrives and scolds him for his vanity. Even Hwin and Aravis tease him for his obvious narcissism. Aslan also rebukes him for his lack of faith. Bree doesn't believe that Aslan is really a lion. Instead, he insists that Aslan has the courage and fierceness of a lion without really being one. He thinks that a lion is too humble of a creature for someone of Aslan's magnitude and importance. Bree's ignorance reminds me that Jesus came to earth, not as God, but as a mortal man. He took on the form of a human to conquer death and sin.

Aslan is a lion; he made the creatures of Narnia in his image, making them beasts. Bree's vanity has taught me how silly it is to be focused on the outside appearance. I could live my entire life obsessing over how I look to the rest of the world, but I want to live my life in a way that is beautiful to Jesus. Jesus, fortunately, cares nothing for temporary beauty. Instead, he seeks out the permanent faith and goodness of the soul.

Hwin is embraced by Aslan because she immediately recognizes Aslan for his greatness. She lays down her life at his feet, telling him that she would rather be eaten by him than fed by anyone else. Aslan promises Hwin joy for her faith. Hwin's significance is found in her belief. She has never seen Aslan. When she does see him, she immediately recognizes him for who he is. She sees his soul and is willing to give up herself for him. Like Hwin, I hope to recognize Jesus immediately even though I have never seen him physically.

Finally, Shasta learns a great deal from Aslan. Aslan talks to him about his constant presence in his life. Aslan told Shasta, "I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you would reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sate, wakeful at midnight, to receive you" (Lewis, *The Horse* 158). Aslan's presence in Shasta's life has not been in obvious ways. Shasta never even knew when Aslan was present. Instead, he learns much later of Aslan's impact in his life. This relationship has taught me to look for God in unusual places in life. Even when I think only a string of coincidences has been the force of my life, it has

actually been God. When I thought bad luck was following me, it was actually the power of God protecting me from greater harm. It was a form of protection I'm only now beginning to see and understand.

The Horse and His Boy taught me many things. Each character had a specific lesson for me to learn. Bree taught me the danger of pride and ego; Hwin taught me the meaning of faith. She knows without a doubt when she sees Aslan. From Aravis, I learned that actions have consequences, some good and some bad. I must be prepared to answer for my role in everything I take part. Finally, Shasta taught me about looking for God at the darkest times. When I feel abandoned because of the poor state of my life, I am not alone. Instead, I am being comforted and protected more than I realized.

There is a great debate surrounding *The Magician's Nephew*. Many argue that this book was meant to be the first in the Chronicles, while others believe it is intended for the sixth book in the series. I tend to see it as the sixth book, which is the order in which I read it. In this book, Aslan creates Narnia and its inhabitants. This book, more than any other, explains all that has made Narnia what it is. The story begins with Digory who befriends a neighbor girl named Polly. They accidentally stumble into Digory's Uncle Andrew's study. He tricks them into taking rings which send them to the Wood between the Worlds. In this Wood are several ponds, each one leads to a different world. They travel to several worlds unintentionally bringing a witch, named Jadis, with them. Those three, Uncle Andrew, and a cabbie named Frank manage to stumble into Narnia as Aslan is creating it. The Talking Beasts are quite confused by the humans and do not understand their presence in Narnia. However, Aslan has a purpose for each of the humans.

Frank and his wife become the rulers of Narnia. Aslan sees that both are kind and just. They will rule Narnia with great wisdom. Aslan sees that the new world will both benefit and be benefited by Frank and Helen. Their rule is legendary in Narnia. Aslan once again finds the strongest characteristics of people and uses his own abilities to enhance these gifts.

Aslan sees that Uncle Andrew is terrified by this world. He sees that Andrew has closed himself off from hearing what Aslan could say. Instead, Aslan comforts him as best as he can; he grants Uncle Andrew the ability to sleep. This sleep is more of a comfort to Andrew than any words could be. Here, Aslan has taught me to serve others in a manner that actually serves those best, instead of what I think is best. Aslan could have tried to cheer up Uncle Andrew, but it would have only created more confusion and fear. Aslan, instead, comforts him a way that actually does help to heal him. This lesson is important to me. Although words and hugs can heal many people, they will not heal everyone. I must focus on each individual rather than on the population as a whole.

Digory's mother is very ill, and he wishes to take an apple to heal her. However, he doesn't steal from the garden, and he is rewarded by Aslan. Aslan gives Digory an apple to take to his mother; the apple heals her. Because Digory brought Jadis into Narnia, he is charged with protecting the world from her. He must retrieve an apple to plant and grow a tree. This tree protects Narnia as a shield from Jadis. Aslan sees that Digory must complete his task to protect Narnia from what he has brought, but he is also rewarded because of his obedience. He knows that he shouldn't steal the apple. His strength of character is rewarded by the healing of his mother. Aslan teaches Digory two things. First, Digory learns that when he makes mistakes, he must do his best to correct

them. Second, Aslan teaches that moral strength and character will be rewarded while moral weakness will be punished. Jadis stole an apple to have endless youth, but she will come to wish she had never eaten the apple. Her youth will be only a burden to her. If we lower our standards to get what we want, we will regret that decision forever. It will haunt us for the rest of our lives.

The Magician's Nephew taught me to uphold my morals. Several of the characters had to make tough decisions regarding personal principles. Most of the characters, such as Jadis and Uncle Andrew, failed to uphold their values in the face of personal gain. However, Digory, a young boy, strongly maintains his morals against great personal conflict. These characters have taught me that compromising my standards will create regret for the rest of my life. Taking a harder path in life while maintaining my principles will be a life of which I can be proud, rather than ashamed.

Narnia was created in the sixth book, but it was ended in the seventh book, *The Last Battle*. In this book, all who love Narnia and Aslan are brought to his home for eternal happiness. This story begins when Shift, an old ape, finds a lion's skin and convinces Puzzle, a gullible donkey, to wear it and act like Aslan. Shift, through Puzzle, begins to take control of Narnia. King Tirian is a young man who is rejoiced to hear that Aslan has returned to Narnia. However, Shift becomes a tyrannical leader who brings only sorrow to the Narnians. Jill and Eustace are once again brought to Narnia to help Tirian. Aslan uses them to ease his way back to Narnia. Meanwhile, Shift makes a deal with the Calormenes, another race of men in the world, to use the Narnians as slaves. They planned to scare them into labor. However, the Calormenes' god arrived to punish them before their plan was executed. The Calormenes decide to force the Narnians into

the presence of their god. However, the Narnians watch as their beloved Narnia is destroyed, and they are brought into the real Narnia. It's the Narnia where Aslan inhabits. Lucy, Edmund, and Peter are all brought into the real Narnia with Digory and Polly. They travel deep into the real Narnia where they eventually meet with Aslan.

Susan does not, however, return to Narnia. Once out of Narnia, Susan focuses only on herself and external beauty and acts as though the adventures in Narnia never took place. Susan only allows Aslan to have a temporary place in her life. She will continue in life in a way that is pleasing only to herself. This relationship has taught me that every relationship requires the active work of at least two people. When Susan leaves Narnia, she quits her work in maintaining a relationship with Aslan. Instead, she decides to forge a relationship with worldly and temporary things. Although it is tempting to love money, power, and beauty, it is easy to see they hold sway only while alive on earth. These things will last only a short time, but faith and love have an eternal place. I must decide if I want to have a temporary relationship with Jesus to enjoy wealth and power, or if I want to give up everything else to serve Him.

For those who remained faithful to Aslan and Narnia, there are great rewards. First, Aslan quietly reprimands Puzzle for his role in Shift's evil plan, but then he cheers him. As always, Aslan tempers his judgment with his mercy. He knows the most effective way to talk to the donkey. Next, Aslan turns his attention to the children. He cheers them by explaining that he has brought them to himself forever. They will never be sent away from him. Their deaths have finally brought them to their final home. Their joy at being with Aslan permanently reminds me of the delight that I have to look forward to. Aslan rewards them for their service with an eternity with him, which is the

greatest prize they can dream of. Aslan shows them that their temporary separation from him was necessary to have the eternity they would now enjoy with him.

The Last Battle showed me the rewards I have in my future as long as I remain faithful. I can't live a temporary relationship and expect to make it to my Narnia, heaven. Instead, I have to be faithful everyday in my thoughts and actions. Many consider death a loss; however, as a Christian woman, I see death as the beginning of an eternity of bliss. I will enjoy the time I have on earth, but no moment as a mortal can compare to any moment of the eternal joy in heaven. The pain and sorrows I feel now will be washed away as I enter heaven.

The Chronicles of Narnia are truly representative of what my faith should be. Aslan represents Jesus. His reprimands and rewards are the same as those I see in my God. I read these books because I wanted to see a movie, but I will reread these books because they show me how my faith should be acted out every day. I can live my life according to Aslan's actions and be blessed in the eternity with my Aslan. I want to take his forgiveness, sacrifice, and courage. I seek to find wisdom and mercy. Without these characteristics, I don't know how I will face my God. These books are important, not only because of the important role faith plays in them, but because they also teach me how a person should live. I want to be like Lucy, Peter, Edmund, Digory, Polly, Eustace, and Jill. I want to live my life with faith like Lucy, courage like Peter, and wisdom like Edmund. I want to have Digory's moral fiber and Polly's loyal friendship. Finally, I would like to live with the bravery and friendship of Eustace and Jill.

I'm not sure I can express the full influence these books have had on my daily life. I have learned to appreciate my friends more fully and depend on my gifts more

strongly. I have learned that even when the sin against me is great, I must forgive it. I have seen what a great leader should be. Aslan is the greatest leader of all, and he teaches Peter to follow his path. I have seen that true worth does not lie in the power and prestige of a person; it lies in the extent of value others place in him. True worth is also found in a person's ability to show love and forgiveness. Mostly, I have learned from these books to live by Aslan's influence. He lives for faith, love, and forgiveness. Without these, my life would be empty. With them, I can find everlasting happiness.

Conclusion

As a little girl, I struggled to learn the alphabet. My parents tried everything to encourage me to learn to read letters. I stubbornly resisted; I was too engrossed in the social scene. My kindergarten teacher insisted I retake the year, but my mom refused. I was grudgingly moved to the first grade and placed in the lowest reading group. I've never understood what happened next. Perhaps I was embarrassed by being in the "dumb" reading group. Maybe the skill of my teachers overcame my lack of focus. It's also possible that my parents' bribes, threats, and blackmails finally paid off. Whatever happened to me changed my life. Throughout the first semester of the first grade I steadily worked my way into the highest reading group. From that point, my true love has been literature. I read anything I can find. When I had read everything in my house the first time, I started over. I spent lunch hours, passing periods, and recesses poring over books in the library. I could never have seen the influence that stringing letters together could produce.

In kindergarten, when I was overly concerned with my pink dresses and a boyfriend, I didn't realize what books could do for me. They have allowed me to love many other things I might never have known. Oddly enough, reading has taught me to appreciate music. Books have taught me to value my health, sanity, and wealth. They have taught me history and philosophy. They have also shown me how much I want to be a doctor. What I have learned most of all has been about relationships. Books have taught me about love and how to show affection. They have taught me how to have friendships, mentorships, romantic attachments, and most importantly a relationship with Jesus Christ. In every book I have read, relationships are inevitable. I have learned relationships

are key to life's possibilities. We cannot survive without the strength of others. Every author seems to have at least one very important relationship he or she is trying to emphasize. Each author I have read shows that there should be one key relationship I cannot live without.

Jane Austen values romantic relationships. Many of the friendships she creates are weak and can't withstand the challenges of life. The guides she gives her heroines have many faults and make countless mistakes. However, the true love between a man and woman in her novels exemplifies devotion. I can read her books and expect at least one marriage by the end of the novel. She values romance between people who can challenge and push one another. In her best stories, she never makes it easy for her lovers to unite. Austen expects romantic love to be difficult, and at times, almost impossible. When her lovers finally reach happily ever after, she makes the love binding and strong. Although I have not yet experienced this strong type of relationship, I know I can expect to have it eventually. Austen has taught me how the best relationships are the ones that need constant upkeep and work to maintain. A relationship that requires no struggles to keep it thriving is not a real relationship. As I have read these novels I appreciate how delicate a romantic relationship is. When one person can destroy a happy match, Austen proves what a struggle a strong romance can be.

J.K. Rowling values friendships. She writes about the relationship for Harry Potter which is vital to his survival. He needs his friends, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, to survive the social, mental, and physical rigors of the wizarding world. Every moment of my life, I've had a Ron and Hermione beside me. I always seem to have the "perfect" friend who can't do wrong, and I always have the friend who does everything

wrong. In high school I had Erin and Kate. Erin was the overachieving perfectionist; Kate was the girl who would lead me directly to trouble. The three of us always managed to land on our feet. I never truly appreciated this friendship until it was long over. I look at what Rowling is telling her readers. Harry has no family left worth having, but he has two invaluable friends who do everything they can to make up for his unfortunate circumstances. Harry is the hero of the wizarding world, but he does not know happiness until he meets Ron and Hermione.

Harry depends greatly on his friends; however, he is not complete without his mentor and guide, Professor Albus Dumbledore. Rowling obviously respects the relationship between student and teacher. Through Dumbledore, Rowling provides Harry with a role model and trusted advisor. I've had several people whom I have considered my mentor. My gymnastics coach Dana taught me a great deal about gymnastics and also life. My eighth grade English teacher taught me how to vent emotions without hurting myself or others while also teaching me how to be a brilliant writer. My boss throughout most of my college years has taught me professionalism and science and also how to be a kind and supportive person. Each of these guides has taught me skills of her craft and, unknowingly, she has taught me about life.

C.S. Lewis treasures his relationship with God and encourages his reader to have the same. The children in his books remind me to keep a child-like faith. The relationship between Aslan and the children is about faith and love. It is the same faith I have as a Christian. Lewis writes fiction and non-fiction. Both center around his Christian beliefs. The children in *The Chronicles of Narnia* make many mistakes; some of these mistakes seem unforgivable. Yet, Aslan always forgives and makes everything work in the end.

This unflinching forgiveness reminds me that even my biggest mistakes are forgiven in the end. My relationship with Jesus is tested by my own weaknesses and shortcomings, not by His. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Aslan sacrifices himself for a little boy who is traitorous. Aslan has shown me how truly great the sacrifice of Jesus really was.

At the end of my four years in college, I am beginning to appreciate these relationships even more. The influence of the friendships I have developed in the past few years will follow me forever, long after the friendship itself has ended. The books I have read have influenced my relationships as well as deepened my appreciation for them. I have learned something from every relationship I have been in, but I have also learned from reading about relationships. They prepare me for what could happen in my own life. The lessons I have learned from these books will continue to guide me as I leave this campus.

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